

## Interview with Brian Herbert

The following interview with Brian Herbert was conducted via e-mail by Dwight S. Pavlovic from Dune Forum ([www.dune2k.com/forum](http://www.dune2k.com/forum)). Byron Merritt delivered the questions to Brian Herbert on Mr. Pavlovic's behalf.

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**1. Would you say that being raised by such a masterful writer as your father influenced your own writing style? Perhaps lending a tendency towards philosophical or religiously oriented writings rather than action or thriller novels?**

**Brian:** As I wrote in the Frank Herbert biography DREAMER OF DUNE, I did not read my father's writings when I was growing up in his household, since there were conflicts between us. However, since I did eavesdrop while he read short stories and novels to my mother, I'm sure that his style "soaked into" my consciousness. Certainly I agree with much of his philosophy and his religious beliefs. In particular, I like his statement in Appendix II of Dune, concerning the C.E.T. (Commission of Ecumenical Translators): "We are here to remove a primary weapon from the hands of disputant religions. That weapon - the claim to possession of the one and only revelation." My novel THE RACE FOR GOD espouses a belief system that is very similar.

**2. When you first began reading your father's literary works, what was your opinion of them? Outside of the Dune series, which of his novels did you enjoy the most?**

**Brian:** My relationship with my father evolved over a period of more than three decades, and an important cornerstone of our relationship was laid when I began to read his stories. He and I were not always close, as I described in DREAMER OF DUNE, and I did not even read Dune until I was in my twenties. When I finally finished it, I thought it was the greatest novel I had ever read, and I still feel that way. Outside the Dune series, I most like SOUL CATCHER, THE WHITE PLAGUE, THE SANTAROGA BARRIER and THE DRAGON IN THE SEA. The last book mentioned is particularly interesting, since Frank Herbert invented containerized shipping in it.

**3. Though the first Dune novel won a Hugo Award, it tied with another novel by Roger Zelazny entitled 'Call Me Conrad.' How do you feel about Dune having to share the honor of a Hugo Award?**

**Brian:** I don't see anything wrong with the award being shared. It's not fair to Zelazny's excellent novel to make any sort of judgment with 20/20 hindsight . . . just because DUNE has become so incredibly popular over the years. Obviously, I think that DUNE was the better of the two books, but I'm a little biased! Of course, DUNE did win the Nebula Award as well, an award that was not shared.

**4. After you discovered your father's notes regarding Dune, how long did it take you to decide you were going to write another book in the Dune series, and then how long did planning Dune: House Atreides take you?**

**Brian:** Actually, I had decided to write a new Dune novel with Kevin J. Anderson before we discovered my father's notes. This is covered in the "Afterword" of DUNE: HOUSE ATREIDES. Part of my evolutionary process toward writing a new series of books involved the five years that I took writing the biography of Frank Herbert, plus an additional year putting together the unpublished DUNE CONCORDANCE, our encyclopedic reference work to all six of Frank Herbert's Dune books. The writing of each Dune novel, including DUNE: HOUSE ATREIDES, takes around a year.

**5. In reading your father's notes, did you ever come across anything that might have suggested there was a connection between Dune and several of his other novels? Though some points have been observed, nothing can yet be called conclusive with regards to this.**

**Brian:** There are many points of comparison between the Dune series and Frank Herbert's other novels and short stories. I did a detailed literary analysis of all his works in DREAMER OF DUNE. Here are just a few of the common threads found in many of his novels and short stories: ecology, genetic memory, oceans, what it means to be human, the dangers of government, examining myth structures, and investigative reporter themes. But this list barely touches the surface of Frank Herbert's thinking.

**6. What originally made you think to request the talents of Kevin J. Anderson in writing the Dune House Prequels and Butlerian Jihad novels? How long did Mr. Anderson need to decide to co-author your new Dune novels? Had any other possible choices for a co-author occurred to you before deciding on Mr. Anderson?**

**Brian:** Kevin J. Anderson sent a letter to me in early 1997, asking if he could write new Dune novels, either alone or in collaboration with me. He had been wanting to do this for years before we ever met. After my father's death I was also approached by other well-known science fiction authors asking the same thing, but I didn't find the necessary inspiration for new stories until I began to speak with Kevin. He and I hit it off immediately, and we are still working very well together. More information on our collaborations is in the "Afterword" of DUNE: HOUSE ATREIDES.

**7. Having both read the Dune novels, did you and Mr. Anderson ever feud over what should and shouldn't be included in the Dune House Prequels and Butlerian Jihad novels?**

**Brian:** Remarkably, we've had no feuds or even minor disagreements over what is to be included in the novels. Kevin and I are on a remarkable journey together through the vast Dune universe, and we both have very similar images of where we want the series to go. We have only had one minor 12-minute argument, and that had nothing to do with the Dune series. How's that for a teaser?

**8. Participating in the numerous book signings for Dune (Mr. Anderson being famous for the frequency with which he attends such events), how did the immense turnout of readers make you feel about your work so far?**

**Brian:** The tremendous support from fans has been encouraging, and has energized us to continue the series. Over and over, the fans are thanking us for writing new stories. The sales have been tremendous, and the reviews excellent. We've received some awards and award nominations along the way as well, which are also very much appreciated.

**9. As I'm sure you are aware, many feel that your recent Dune novels are not fitting additions to the Dune series, and have been vocal about it. Have you given any of this hardcore criticism significant consideration while writing your novels?**

**Brian:** I don't think that it would be possible to write new novels in the Dune series without receiving some criticism from fans. The most vociferous criticisms actually came several years ago, before we had published even one of the new books - from fans who were worried about what would happen to their beloved Dune universe when Kevin J. Anderson and I became involved in it. Thankfully, we subsequently received apology letters from a number of those same fans after they'd actually read DUNE: HOUSE ATREIDES, meaning that we earned the respect of even our most severe critics. I feel that Dune fans have a stake in Frank Herbert's fantastic science fiction universe, and that these fans only want to see

the integrity of the stories maintained. The way I look at it, my father left me a family business, somewhat akin to a Grand Cru wine, and I'm working to maintain the quality of the vintage. Some of the recent criticisms have been unfair, though. For example, the suggestion that we drew inspiration from "Terminator" movies. Actually, Frank Herbert wrote in DUNE about the dangers of artificial intelligence more than forty years ago - long before "Terminator" came on the scene. With that said, those few fans who think that our latest books are not worthy additions to the series should keep in mind the context of the "Butlerian Jihad" that Frank Herbert set up - the whole Jihad has to be about massive computer systems and robots, and the war of the humans to free themselves from the control of AI machines. On the surface, this may not sound like "Dune," since there are no legal computers at the time of the first novel DUNE. However, we are writing these stories in a very "Frank Herbertesque" way, dealing with the very large question of what it means to be human, when machines are attempting to take away the humanity of our protagonists. We are also dealing with the mythology that thinking machines will make our lives easier - just one of the many myth structures that Frank Herbert loved to expose. Readers should keep in mind as well the fact that Kevin and I are writing in a more updated, modern style. Obviously our style has roots in the way that Frank Herbert wrote, but our new stories have a great deal of action in them, along with the very important religious, political, ecological, and philosophical messages, that are essential to the Dune universe. We most admire the style of DUNE itself, with its classic, mythical adventure story on the surface, and the expertly layered messages beneath. Even Frank Herbert changed his own style in his later Dune novels - especially in the last three. In those books - GOD EMPEROR OF DUNE, HERETICS OF DUNE, and CHAPTERHOUSE: DUNE, he sometimes moved the action into the background (including the destruction of the planet Dune) and was more interested in examining politics, religion, etc. through the conversations of the characters. In doing this, he was exploring the layers he had established in DUNE. Anyone who professes to be a critic might consider the context of a particular novel, and might also keep in mind that it is impossible to please everyone. This is particularly true in the Dune universe, where readers have developed such vivid images in their minds, especially based upon the first novel DUNE. Any film or written sequel set in that universe would have a hard time measuring up to such a classic novel! Frank Herbert's sequels were criticized for the same reason. Sometimes those criticisms were unfair - such as concerning the dark side of the hero Paul Atreides that he explored in DUNE MESSIAH (see DREAMER OF DUNE for an explanation). By the same token, some of the criticisms of the new stories that I have written with Kevin do not take enough facts into account. After we published the first Dune short story "A Whisper of Caladan Seas," one critic questioned why we included such a strong extrasensory theme in the story, and said that this was not in the Dune universe. Obviously, that critic missed the scenes in DUNE in which Paul takes the Water of Life, and in which Guild Navigators use their prescience to find safe pathways through fold-space.

**10. Have you ever read any of your recent Dune novels after their publication, and observed anything you felt very strongly about changing?**

**Brian:** This question makes me think of what Aldous Huxley said about BRAVE NEW WORLD, decades after the classic novel was published. In rereading it, he found many changes that could be made, but he thought that it should remain unchanged, since it represented a particular moment of his life, the spark of his intellect at the time. I feel the same way about each novel I write. If I were to go back and try to rewrite each of them, someone would have to put me in a rubber room. We have found minor errors in our Dune novels after publication, and we have gone back to the publishers and asked them to make corrections. We also found some minor errors in the original Frank Herbert books. This is part of the writing business. Keep in mind, too, that as writers we are only human - we're not thinking machines.

**11. In writing your Dune novels, did you ever find yourself particularly attached to any characters, or simply especially pleased with the way one turned out?**

**Brian:** I particularly like Duke Leto in our first three prequel novels, and Erasmus in the current Jihad series. Duke Leto is an admirable, heroic figure, and he makes me think of my father. Erasmus is exactly the opposite. But he, in a very Frank Herbert way, is investigating the nature of humanity - and he's as dark a character as we have ever created, with his Dr. Joseph Mengele (Nazi death doctor) personality.

**12. Has writing the Dune House Prequels and Butlerian Jihad novels ever interfered with any other writing projects that you wanted to work on?**

**Brian:** Life is about making choices, and setting priorities. Like other writers, I have more story ideas than I will ever be able to write, but that doesn't particularly bother me. I just go through them on a priority basis, and write them when I have the time. My upcoming story of the U.S. Merchant Marines - THE FORGOTTEN HEROES - is a case in point (Tor Books, Spring 2004). It is an important story about men who deserve to be recognized for their contributions to this country. Somehow I fit all of the work on THE FORGOTTEN HEROES in between Dune novels, but it really strained my relationship with my wife. I had to grovel a lot afterward, but that's part of the writing business, too.

**13. How much influence does the Herbert Limited Partnership actually have with regards to novels published as part of the Dune series?**

**Brian:** Following the tragic death of my father, I managed the Herbert family business with my sister, Penny Merritt. Together, we make decisions about the general direction that the Dune series will take. Penny works closely with me on business decisions while my co-author, Kevin J. Anderson, works more closely with me on the creative decisions.

**14. Have you ever considered bringing in any other Herbert family members, that are competent as far as writing fiction, to participate in writing additions to the Dune series?**

**Brian:** Yes, we have considered bringing in other Herbert family members. In fact, my talented nephew, Byron Merritt, is currently earning his stripes in the writing business and is doing quite well as a writer. One of the difficulties in bringing in any new writers, whether from within the family or not, involves the tremendous amount of research that they would need to make before tackling a Dune story. Our fans pay close attention to details!

**15. Have you conclusively decided to continue the Dune series with Dune 7? If so, have you decided on how many books this continuation will come as?**

**Brian:** In August 2004, we will publish the third book in our Jihad series, entitled THE BATTLE OF CORRIN. Approximately one year later, we expect to publish the first of two "Dune 7" novels. The first, in 2005, has the working title HUNTERS OF DUNE. The second, in 2006, has the working title SANDWORMS OF DUNE. Both are Frank Herbert titles, for various stories he was writing in his Dune universe - and should give the fans some clue about the direction we intend to take with each novel. Since there are twelve Dune novels preceding "Dune 7," we could not tell the climactic story in one novel, and needed to do it in two books. We also hope to publish THE ROAD TO DUNE in the spring of 2006, which will be a collection of unpublished chapters and scenes written by Frank Herbert, along with essays and other commentary.

**16. What are your personal feelings regarding Dr. McNelly's Dune Encyclopedia? What sort of contact did you have with Dr. McNelly prior to his death?**

**Brian:** A few years ago, we published a joint statement with Dr. McNelly on our website (dunenovels.com) concerning THE DUNE ENCYCLOPEDIA. Please refer to our website for this statement about a book that is an entertaining, but alternate view of the Dune universe. Frank Herbert did not treat it as his canon for the novels he wrote, and Kevin and I have not used it for our new stories, either. THE DUNE ENCYCLOPEDIA is just one of several interpretations of the Dune universe. One of the wonderful things about the Dune universe is its ability to generate incredible images in the minds of readers. As I mentioned in the answer to Question #9, a few fans have different views of the Dune universe than either Kevin or I have. That's fine with us, and we accept that. It is, in fact, one of the fascinating aspects of my father's creation. In DREAMER OF DUNE, I described the saga of many attempts to film DUNE. Over the years several film producers were involved in the project, beginning with Arthur P. Jacobs, who wanted David Lean ("Lawrence of Arabia") to direct. When that fell through, Alejandro Jodorowsky and the surrealist painter Salvador Dali became involved - which would have resulted in a substantially different, more bizarre view of the Dune universe than Jacobs and Lean would have presented. The 1984 David Lynch movie was yet another interpretation, and so was Richard Rubinstein's excellent and faithful 2000 television adaptation starring William Hurt. In all, film producers have had four very different ways of looking at the complex novel DUNE and trying to bring it to the screen. The written word is like that, too. Kevin J. Anderson and I are presenting our interpretation of the Dune universe. In large part, this is based upon the very close relationship that I developed with my father.

**17. Some have suggested that Dr. McNelly and your father, Frank Herbert, were in fact planning to write a Dune novel entitled "The Butlerian Jihad" but could only finish two chapters of it. It has also been suggested that these chapters were given to you. Did you perhaps base any events in the Butlerian Jihad on these two chapters? If not, do you ever plan to make these two lost sections available to the public?**

**Brian:** That rumor is not correct. Dr. McNelly and Frank Herbert did not work on a new "Butlerian Jihad" novel, and they certainly didn't write two chapters together. Dr. McNelly did express a desire to write his own Butlerian Jihad novel, but we never authorized him to proceed with the project.

**18. What were your first impressions and later thoughts regarding the recent Dune Miniseries productions done by the sci-fi channel? How do you feel they compare to David Lynch's Dune film project?**

**Brian:** The two recent Dune miniseries are terrific, especially when you consider the fact that they were filmed with a limited television budget. Thanks to the dedication of the Executive Producer, Richard Rubinstein, these series follow the Frank Herbert plots very closely. This makes them an excellent place for new fans to enter the Dune universe, because fans can begin to understand the very complex subjects that Frank Herbert set up. It is logical to read DUNE, DUNE MESSIAH, and CHILDREN OF DUNE afterward, to get an even deeper understanding. In contrast, the 1984 David Lynch production is not the place to begin - since it does not always follow the plot (Paul shouldn't make rain on Arrakis!), and since Lynch's original five hours of film was cut. Even with its errors, however, I still enjoy watching the Lynch version for its great acting, sets, costumes, and cinematography. I like the two new TV series more, however, since they are opening Dune up to more readers. Since the TV series' began, and our new Dune novels got out, the sales of Frank Herbert's first three Dune books have more than tripled. This means that readers are discovering (and rediscovering) a classic novel that will be read for centuries to come.

**19. Would you personally advocate all of your father's Dune novels being made into similar miniseries'? Do you foresee the possibility of any of your recent Dune novels being made into a film or miniseries?**

**Brian:** We have signed television contracts for all six of Frank Herbert's Dune series books, and expect to see them all filmed. Of course, we need to complete the two 'Dune 7' novels before those stories can be told in full. I think that the logical next step for television would be a stand-alone movie of GOD EMPEROR OF DUNE - either a two hour or three hour movie. We are also considering other film projects.

**20. While writing some of your other stand alone science fiction novels, what were your feelings towards Dune and your relationship to it?**

**Brian:** Mmmm. That sounds like the subject for an interesting essay. There are some Dune parallels in my novels SIDNEY'S COMET and THE RACE FOR GOD, but both of those novels are satirical. When I started writing, I published humor books and satires, so there were not too many comparisons with the very serious nature of the Dune books. I think that I really set myself on a course to write new Dune stories when I put so much effort into researching and writing DREAMER OF DUNE, the biography of my father. That massive 5-year project involved reading and rereading everything he wrote, both published and unpublished. After completing the biography, I was a different sort of writer, more introspective and serious. I also had a deeper understanding of this very complex man, Frank Herbert. In my subsequent writing projects, I began to think a lot more about my father's works, both inside and outside the Dune series.

**21. Excluding your father, what author would you say you admire or enjoy reading the most?**

**Brian:** I admire many writers, including John Steinbeck, David Guterson, Aldous Huxley, George RR Martin, and Larry McMurtey. My tastes are somewhat eclectic. I even went through a phase where I read everything that Dean Koontz wrote, and in the process I learned a lot about characterization and building suspense. I particularly admire some of the other writers on my list, however, because of the sweeping scale of their stories, and the fascinating social commentaries they make.

**22. What do you think your father would say of your recent work, if he were able to do so?**

**Brian:** Many reviewers and fans have said that my father would be pleased with my contributions to his fantastic Dune universe, and that he would be proud of me. I appreciate such accolades, and they only make me want to work harder to produce excellent, interesting stories. My father taught me to be an entertainer first, and to layer any important messages beneath the adventure stories. This is just one of the many things that he taught me about the writing craft, and which I think of often as I work on new stories.

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-This interview was made possible (and transcribed) by Byron Merritt, grandson of Frank Herbert and nephew to Brian Herbert.

-Questions 11, 13, and 17 were contributed by Fed2k Staff ([www.dune2k.com](http://www.dune2k.com) - Mahdi).